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SUBJECT: HOLY CROSS OPENING - ARMENIA MORE POSITIVE AS THINGS COOL
DOWN

REF: A) YEREVAN 386 B) ADANA 47

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(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Following local media criticism of Turkey's decision to reopen the ancient Armenian Holy Cross Church as a museum (refs), the GOAM delegation that took part in the ceremony tried to focus on the positive aspects of the renovation. During a press conference, Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjyan defended the government's decision to send a delegation to the opening and talked about the importance of maintaining a dialogue with Turkey. Turkish press has reported that the GOAM agreed to restore a mosque in Armenia, however, the seriousness of the agreement is unclear. End Summary.

MUTUAL TRUST VITAL

¶2. (SBU) Following their return from Turkey, members of the Armenian delegation held a press conference April 2. Deputy Minister of Culture Gyurjyan, who led the delegation, insisted that Armenia's participation in the reopening had been essential to help reduce tension between Armenia and Turkey, and to encourage the preservation of other Armenian monuments in Turkey. He emphasized the need for dialogue between the countries, and the importance of building mutual trust: "Today we don't trust each other ... that is why when Iran hangs its flag on an Armenian church, we do not complain; because there is trust. But when the same thing is done in Turkey, in accordance with their law, we are resentful."

RECONSTRUCTION - A GREAT ACHIEVMENT, MOTIVES ASIDE

¶3. (SBU) The delegation said it was satisfied with the quality of the renovation, and noted that, even though the church had been reopened as a museum, Turkey's efforts saved it from complete destruction. Gyurjyan said Armenia should welcome such projects, even if they are used by the Turks for political purposes. The deputy minister also defended Patriarch Mutafyan (ref A), saying that he addressed all the important issues that needed to be discussed in his speech, including organizing services and placing a cross on the building. Gyurjyan also said he believed those two issues likely would be resolved. He concluded that there was no

need for the Armenian delegation to speak as well.

FUTURE PROJECTS TOGETHER - IN TURKEY

14. (SBU) The delegation highlighted the necessity of maintaining good relations between the two countries so that Armenian experts could play a role in future restoration projects in Turkey. They reported that Turkey had already established a five-year project, beginning in 2008, to reconstruct the ruins of the ancient Armenian capital of Ani. According to Gyurjyan, both sides would benefit if Armenians provided their expertise for such projects. The delegation noted that Armenians and Turks would continue discussing reconstruction projects when the manager of the project to renovate Holy Cross visits Armenia this summer.

... AND IN ARMENIA

15. (SBU) Turkish press reported that Armenia promised to restore a mosque on its territory in response to Turkey's restoration of Holy Cross. The Armenian media have not yet reported this development. The State Agency for Monument Protection told us Gyurjyan invited Turkey to select a mosque in Armenia for restoration, but an MFA official told us that the subject had been raised by Turkish media during a press conference, and that Gyurjyan had said, "Sure, why not." According to the Ministry of Culture, in addition to a fully restored Iranian mosque in downtown Yerevan, there are at least two mosques in villages in the regions.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The Armenian delegation's balanced comments, though not

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necessarily demonstrative of goodwill towards Turkey, at least show a reluctance on the part of the government to antagonize the GOT. The delegation's remarks also had a positive effect on Armenian public opinion concerning the opening and future Turkish-Armenian cooperation, counterbalancing the initially negative reporting in the Armenian press.

GODFREY